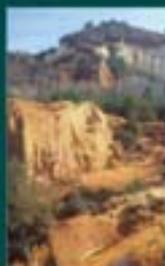
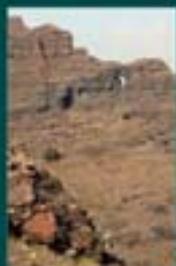
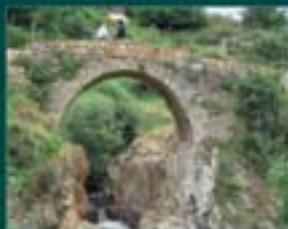


EUROPEAN GEOPARKS



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## NATURTEJO MESETA MERIDIONAL

Share a moment of deep Time



Think about the most beautiful landscape you have ever visited, the most astounding place that really impressed you. It is amazing how easily you can recall every detail imprinted on your imagination. But have you, by any chance, ever asked yourself how this dream landscape stands out from all the other places you have experienced, which elements contribute to this ideal of perfection, and above all why does that place give you so much pleasure? This is the aim of a new concept in tourism: the Geopark Naturtejo Meseta Meridional. This territory embraces some of the most outstanding places in Portugal, where it is possible to appreciate the mysteries of natural complexity shaped by the Earth's dynamics and the way in which Man wisely shaped the landscape. This is a region where every rock can tell you wonderful stories, where fields, villages and local people share with you the quality of being genuine, where all the trails end inexorably in self awareness. Traveling from site to site, visitors will discover details of a vast and fascinating natural history. The landscape will reveal the emergence of mountain belts where wide oceans once existed, where gravel deserts formed in areas once crossed by ice, and where the flow of the Tejo River has been tamed by man.

Geopark Naturtejo is the first Portuguese Geopark to be integrated into the European and Global Geoparks Networks. It is a vast territory, 4625 km<sup>2</sup>, covering the municipalities of Castelo Branco, Idanha-a-Nova, Nisa, Oleiros, Proença-a-Nova and Vila Velha de Rfídão. The main task of the Geopark is to appreciate and conserve the sites that provide key-testimonies of the Earth's history, to instigate geo-tourism and to promote regional sustainable economic development. The wonderful geomorphological, geological, palaeontological and mining heritages are monuments with regional to international geological significance. Examples are the wonderful exposures of trilobite trace fossils in the Penha Garcia Ichnological Park, and the impressive quartzite gorges of the Penha Garcia, Malhada Velha, Portas do Rfídão and Almourão. Further attractions include the huge Roman gold mine of Conchal do Arneiro, the gigantic meanders of the Zêzere River and the strange granite morphologies of Serra da Gardunha and Monsanto. In addition to geo-monuments, the Geopark Naturtejo includes environmentally and ecologically significant areas. The Tejo International Natural Park, Portas do Rfídão Natural Monument, areas in municipalities (sites Gardunha, Nisa and S. Mamede) and important bird sanctu-

aries (Penha Garcia-Toulôes and the quartzite range of Rfídão) are protected within the remit of the Natura 2000 Network. The rich cultural history of this region is revealed by the presence of hundreds of archaeological sites, the highest concentration of Templar castles in Portugal, dozens of churches and manor houses and a total of 70 protected monuments. There are also the historical villages of Monsanto and Idanha-a-Velha, the latter being the most precious testimony of a powerful Roman-Visigoth Civitas. The ancient ways of life bear witness to the unique variation within a borderland culture and have deep roots in the ancient landscape. The prizes for the "the most Portuguese village" awarded to Monsanto and the Slate Villages are symbols of this well preserved ethnographic richness.

Geopark Naturtejo Meseta Meridional offers one of the densest trekking networks in Portugal. Amongst the geological wonders you can find the Fossils, the Mines, the Boulders and the Cobbles Trails, as well as the Gardunha and the Secrets of the Almourão Valley Foot-Paths. Along the Fossils Trail and in Portas do Rfídão Natural Monument you can visit the Climbing Schools where activities such as climbing, abseiling on the quartzites, horse riding along old smuggling routes that cross the Penha Garcia Syncline are guaranteed to raise adrenaline levels. The quiet waters of Tejo River offer beautiful boat trips departing from Vila Velha do Rfídão to explore the gorge of Portas do Rfídão, the nesting areas of gryphon vultures and the Tejo's Rock Art. Water which has travelled deep in the Earth may be calmly enjoyed in the magnificent thermal spas of Monfortinho and Fadagosa de Nisa. Visitors to the Tejo International Natural Park feel dwarfed by the immensity of one of the most important wildlife sanctuaries in all Europe. To complete the experience enjoy the best of local food in Petiscos & Granitos, the first geological restaurant in Europe, while sitting under giant granite boulders with wide views across the Geopark and the most superb sunsets.

Are you feeling curious? Do you dare accept a challenge? For your next holidays come to Geopark Naturtejo Meseta Meridional and allow yourself to be lost in its most hidden trails. There are 600 million years of wonders to discover. I guarantee you it will be worth-while!

*C. N. DE CARVALHO*



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Figure 1. A field monument of the Megalithic culture reveals a 5000 year old human-rock relationship (S. Gens Dolmen, Nisa). (Photo by Pedro Martins)

Figure 2. Portas do Rfidão Natural Monument. Nature's tribute to the Geological Heritage (Photo by Pedro Martins)

Figure 3. Petiscos & Granitos geo-restaurant: built from the giant granite boulders, a terrace from which the vastness of space can be viewed (Monsanto Historical Village). (Photo by Carlos Neto de Carvalho)

Figure 4. Penha Garcia Ichnological Park: a symbiosis between a 500 million years biotope and secular traditions as a source of inspiration, enjoyment and learning. (Photo by Pedro Martins)

Figure 5. Geoactivities for everyone: panning for gold in the Ocreza river, near the traditional Foz do Cobrão Schist Village. (Photo by Carlos Neto de Carvalho)

Figure 6. Amieira do Tejo castle: one of the national monuments, built by the Order of the Hospitallers and a sophisticated example of early gothic military architecture celebrating persistence and freedom. (Photo by Pedro Martins)

Figure 7. Raiano Cultural Centre: the last borderland bastion against human desertification and the gateway to the Naturtejo Geopark. (Photo by Pedro Martins)



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NATURTEJO GEOPARK  
 Head Office: Centro Cultural Raiano  
 Av. Zona Nova de Expansão  
 6060-101 Idanha-a-Nova, PORTUGAL  
 e-mail: geral@naturtejo.com  
 www.geoparknaturtejo.com